1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

lineage, either as consanguine or classificatory kin. Other lines of relatives are sometimes found, but no relative from the opposite moiety ever belongs to ego's clan. The mari and kutara lines are sometimes members of ego's clan (mari, mother's mother, mother's mother's brother; kutara, sister's daughter's daughter, sister's daughter's son).

An important activity of the clan is war, the clan being the war-making group.[7] Within this group no violent conflict ever takes place, no matter how much cause is given. Members may quarrel, but for clansmen to fight one another would be considered an unnatural act in Murngin society and it never occurs. When the clan is at war the ceremonial leader almost always acts as the war leader. A clan seldom goes to battle as a group against another one, but usually has an eternal feud with certain others which results in occasional ambushes in which a man or two is killed.

The demographic aspects of Murngin society are extremely difficult to ascertain, owing to the roving life and impossibility of a head census. Genealogies showed the Kolpa (northern Wessel Island)[8] to be a group of about twenty-five relatives. The clan itself, as well as those who did not belong to it or their (the Yaernungo) tribe, considered this below the normal population level. The Liaalaomir (Glyde River) clan genealogies include around fifty people; the clansmen seem satisfied with their numbers, possessing a sense of well-being as a group not evident among the Kolpa. This was also true of clans like the Liagaomir (the mainland south of Howard Island) and the Daiuror (interior south of Howard Island). The Wangurri (see page 42 for location) have some sixty or seventy members in their clan. The Warumeri, to their north, now have about forty people, since the last generation suffered a severe loss through a disastrous fight with the Wangurri over the right to certain women.

The Yalukal and Barlmawi at the present time have only one male member each. It is highly likely that such clans will disappear, continuance being dependent upon the male line. The land will continue to belong to the dead clan until in several generations the memory of it is lost and new traditions have filled the thought of the natives. The land and water holes will then belong to another group which will have been occupying it since the demise of its former owners. The

[7] The statement that the clan is a war-making group needs further elaboration and amendments which are given in Chapter VI.

[8] See map, page 40, and list of clans, pages 39-51.

5: Webb M-5 (ca. 1930) 1934
O117 Murngin O117

Warfare and Physique

Warfare

[619] 721 On account of the want of cohesion between the various tribal hordes, each of which maintains to a large extent a separate and independent existence, various causes, such as the competition for women, give rise to much hostility, and warfare is a pronounced feature of the life of this aboriginal community. Though an organised clash of arms is of infrequent occurrence, many are killed under varied circumstances as a result of this tribal hostility. 628 Numerous killings also result from family vendettas, which are carried on through many generations. In the pursuance of these vendettas the usual practice is to take a man by stealth, while he is asleep or when separated from his companions.

A ceremony known as "Makkarata" is a very important and valuable means of healing breaches of the peace. In this ceremony two groups of men, composed of the offending and the offended tribes or divisions respectively, take up their positions some 150 yards apart on a piece of open ground. With each of these groups will be a number of neutral men, who are not concerned in the dispute in question, whose duty it is to see that no unfair advantage is taken by either party.

The chief offender, who is also accompanied by neutrals, then runs backwards and forwards across the centre of the ground, while each man of the offended party throws one or more spears at him. If this man succeeds in avoiding the spears thrown, he then, in a descriptive dance, approaches the offended party, and taking his stand in front of their leader thrusts out his leg, into which a spear is promptly plunged. In this way the offence is wiped out, and peace is restored between these previously hostile parties. I have known feuds of many years' standing to be completely healed by this ceremony.

Physique

142 These coastal tribes of East Arnhem Land are physically of a fine type, virile, pugnacious, and manly. Though generally somewhat slighter in build, the average height of both sexes is approximately the same as that of our own race. Because of their nomadic life, their continual walking, running and dancing, most

9: Thomson E-5 (1935-1943)1949
O117 Murngin O117

of the natives of North-eastern Arnhem Land, and to show how the impact upon these primitive hunting people of a virile culture from Indonesia, which has probably occurred only during the past two hundred years, has stimulated a remarkable ceremonial exchange cycle so that goods were passed far inland from the coast, while others were drawn from places hundreds of miles to the southward. This cycle, though in itself primarily social and not economic, supplies the motive force, the "drive", under cover of which an elaborate system of *ceremonial exchange* has been developed. This in turn furnishes the mechanism for the circulation of wealth or *gerri* (applied collectively to "goods" or "possessions", to material wealth), that would have been restricted, or at least rendered difficult, by the social structure of these people without the influence of the culture from Indonesia.[5]

[5] The fact that ceremonial exchange systems appear to have been widespread in Australia has been pointed out (see page 2). But the special type of local organisation which occurred in Arnhem Land, combined with the war-like reputation enjoyed by these people, would have tended to restrict communication. A remarkable feature of the social organisation of Arnhem Land north of a line from Bennet Bay and east of Cape Stewart, is the absence of any tribal organisation. The absence of tribal organisation to provide a basis for a wider solidarity, such as exists in neighbouring territories, has tended, as is shown on pages 9 to 13, to foster an intense internal solidarity within the clan, and within the larger group which consists of an aggregation of clans, called *mälla*; and thus to intensify the opposition with other groups. The effect of this social organisation, which was probably unstable, seems to be reflected in the intense and bitter rivalry and almost constant fighting, which raged among the hordes in far Eastern Arnhem Land, and which was responsible for many deaths. These are not conditions which encourage free intercourse and communication between groups widely separated, and although an extensive ceremonial exchange system undoubtedly existed long before visitors from the

[121] 177 Before discussing the effect of the ceremonial exchange cycle which was greatly stimulated by the impact of this dynamic force—the infiltration of Indonesian culture—upon the relatively simple culture pattern of these people, I shall describe in outline the typical culture of this area. It can be shown that in their own culture pattern, before the impact of Malay or proto-Malay culture, the natives of Arnhem Land already possessed the essential elements of a simple economic structure, with recognition of "value" and "wealth", the beginnings of the development of craft specialisation, mechanisms for the organisation of work and the carrying out of communal enterprises, and very definite ideas about the division of labour.

174 It is not possible to state with certainty when the first contact with the Indonesian visitors commenced, but in 1803 Matthew Flinders[6] learned from the crews of Malay praus whom he met on the north coast, that sixty praus, with a total of 1000 men, all from the Gulf of Boni in the Celebes, were on the coast of Arnhem Land at one time and were engaged in fishing for trepang. Although some of these people informed Flinders that they had visited the coast for the first time only twenty years before, and that they were then among the first of their people to do so,

177 431 619 724 Celebes came to Arnhem Land, it is probable that the *gerri* introduced by these visitors did much to overcome the effects of the segmentary organisation and to infuse life and vitality into the ceremonial exchange cycle which developed on a large scale in this territory. One of the aims of this paper is to show how the impact of this virile Indonesian culture may have overcome the effects of the intensely *segmentary* organisation. This effect of the ceremonial exchange cycle on social organisation is discussed in detail at a later stage in this paper.

[6] Matthew Flinders, *A Voyage to Terra Australis*, Vol. 2, 1814, pp. 228-233.

9: Thomson E-5 (1935-1943)1949
O117 Murngin O117

by repeated intervention of the Australian Customs Authorities after Federation. The Indonesian influence in Arnhem Land, therefore, probably extended over a period of nearly two hundred years, perhaps much longer. Although there is no conclusive evidence as to the time when these visits commenced, there is reason for the belief that they occurred over a relatively long period, and a study of the culture shows that the visitors from Indonesia exercised a strong influence on the people. This is apparent in their material culture, and to an even greater extent in their social and ceremonial life and mythology. I have mentioned (page 71, footnote) my surprise at finding in settled country on the Roper River, even before I entered the then isolated country of Arnhem Land, fine iron spear heads from Blue Mud Bay, an area where iron was still difficult to obtain and much coveted. The natives of this region have been suspected of attacking *bêche-de-mer* and other craft merely for the iron in the water tanks and trepang boilers, from which, by a laborious process of hammering and grinding, they manufacture fine spear heads. This was in 1935, when I had been sent by the Commonwealth Government to investigate unrest and tribal fighting in Arnhem Land. The people of Caledon and Blue Mud Bays were regarded as warlike and aggressive and were still greatly feared by the natives to the south, with whom they had little contact and who would not have entered their territory.

Subsequent work in Arnhem Land revealed the existence of the great ceremonial exchange cycle which has been described in detail on page 67 above. But while the *kumur märnda* relationship exists throughout the whole of Arnhem Land, and while the ceremonial exchange cycle draws *gerri* from far beyond this region, there is evidence for the belief that it was the visits of Macassar voyagers, who

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
O117 Murngin O117

only did he identify the killers by relationship signs, but said that only one body had been recovered and that the killers had escaped to their own country near Arnhem Bay.

Undoubtedly this sign-language has been used in silently planning and directing well-organized attacks that bewildered marauding traders and took police parties by surprise. Attempts have been made to prove that messages have been tapped out on musical clapsticks, but clapsticks are used only for a limited number of timings in songs. Full details and the signal for attack have been given unobtrusively in sign-language by merely flicking the hands.

Just as the spoken language is a living one, so the sign-language is being extended to include developments from contact with foreigners. Reference to police is made by placing the wrists side by side and holding them in front to suggest handcuffs. Macassar proas and sailing-boats are indicated by stretching an arm forward, clenching the hand, and raising the thumb for a mast; a boat captain by closing the hands, as on a wheel, and swaying from the hips as when heaving on a helm. A white man's sign is in bending the elbows, sweeping the hands to the breasts and then downwards and outwards; his gun in bending the head to the right, squinting along an imaginary barrel held in the left hand, and drawing the right trigger hand backwards. Wiping a crooked forefinger along the lips refers to tobacco; cattle or tinned meat are denoted by placing a closed hand on either temple and extending the forefingers to look like horns.

I took Burramurra to Darwin for medical attention, and after a few days' treatment I brought him from hospital. He attracted some attention by his awkward gait, and another nomad waved his hands and looked questioningly toward us, till Burramurra answered him with laughter and further hand movements. He told me he had just been asked if he had been drinking whisky and where had he got it?

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
OII7 Murngin OII7

761 relatives and friends is a matter of amusement. It is only possible to die once, and in the ageless wandering through the unbroken round of day and night, the Stone Age fatalist finds his highest form of excitement in continuing a feud, in [021] raiding other hordes, and in other forms of violence, such as capturing women from another man—in itself a profitable pastime. A general raid is the *pièce de résistance*.

522 [152] Nevertheless I found nomads to be happy and cheerful; they bear pain and disappointment and face death with extraordinary courage. Resilient natures find humour in a mundane primeval world, and they are always on the look-out for something to laugh at—even to the extent of being amused at the contortions of an expiring enemy or at a healthy man's imitation of physical disabilities in another. Youths and men are convulsed with laughter at the antics of a man aping the gait of a leper, and at the uncertain gropings of the partially blind. Jokes are very simple, and the average is no better than a jealous remark about an old man negotiating for youthful wives: 'He must be a turtle', the reference being to the fact that a turtle usually lays several dozen eggs.

157 Under all this rank growth of primitive emotion lie the roots of qualities we value most in civilized man; such as courage, kindliness, devotion, and honesty. Stone Age man 609 is ordinarily well intentioned toward the welfare of any white man or alien stranded in the bush, and countless stories are told of their rescue of them. In such circumstances they treat them as privileged invalids, and except when bad impressions have been made by previous visitors, they are accepted at face-value. If they act as gentlemen they are treated as such; but if they abuse the hospitality of their hosts, and attempt to rape the women, as has frequently happened, they are exterminated by the only law known to the nomad.

It is impossible to walk through the bush and not notice